Making group work work

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JIN
Kinds of group work

• Problem solving
• Skills practice
• Small group discussion
• Lecture breaks
• Other
Research

• **Elementary education**

• **Second language acquisition**
  Flowerdew, 1997; Long & Porter, 1985; Pica, 1987; MacIntyre, 2002; Loewen, et al, 2009

• **Business environment**

• **STEM**
Reasons for group work

• High impact teaching
• Higher level thinking
• Social skills – listening, leadership, appreciation for diverse perspectives
• Preparation for real life
• Rhythm
• More participation
• Efficiency – stretching time & attention
Israeli Culture and Society

Religion & state case study
preparation: articles
activity: role play real-life situation
task: solution

Family tree
prep: read novel, take notes, write response
follow up- questions and discussions

Film – information exchange
four films; guided discussion
groups
Challenges

• Task design & articulation
• Group formation
• Behavior
• Differences
• Timing
• Assessment
• Classroom configuration
Group formation

- Size – appropriate to task (and number of groups)
  maximize diversity and participation
  optimal size: 4-5? (pair-work, triads, larger groups for more complex tasks [subgroups])
- Self selecting, random, criterion-based, configured
- Complementary or equivalent?
- One-time, entire semester, or in-between
Behavior issues

• Off-task -
Make sure that the directions are clearly articulated, that students understand their roles, and understand the assessment criteria; circulate among groups.

• Non-participation
Consider assigning roles; try to find out why the student is not participating; put quiet students in same group.

• Over-participation
Sit next to student who dominates/let student know (s)he doesn’t need to do all the work/ask student to allow others to participate.
Roles

- Assigned? By you? By a group member?
- For a task that results in a written document: Taking notes, creating outline, writing first draft, revising, reporting to the class
- For a discussion: Secretary, spokesperson, facilitator or timekeeper, etc.
- Consider asking a dominant person to take notes, a more reticent person to be the reporter
Differences

• Social anxiety
• Different cultural norms
• Other
Timing

• There is always one group that finishes before others, and/or one that takes longer to complete the task.

• Plan for it. Have an additional task – a follow-up question, a second charge - either for the group, or for each to work on individually.
Follow-up

• There needs to be some follow-up to the group activity for students to think it has value (and, in fact, if there is not any follow-up, was it worth doing?).
• Follow up can be as simple as each group reporting briefly on their findings. If groups all have the same task, the reports can get redundant.
• If each student is responsible for the results of every group, the follow up discussion will be more highly valued.
• Written product
• Other
Assessment

• Self-assessment

• Peer assessment – each student grades every group member; or has to apportion percentage of effort

• Instructor assessment

• Combination

• Clear criteria, rubrics for participation & contribution
Take Aways: General*

• Group work is a complex topic.
• There is no one-size-fits-all formula.
• Try varying the size and make-up of group-work.
• Similar group issues occur in diverse courses.

* From the workshop participants
Design and Value*

*from the workshop participants

- The task has to be well-constructed, and well-explicated.
- Start with learning outcomes. Think through the purpose of the group work before creating the assignment.
- Design the work to be of value to the students and the course.
- It should lend itself to being done in group.
- It should be more valuable than having the work done individually.
Directions*

• Clearly articulate goals and expectations of the group assignment.
• Make the value of the group work explicit.
• Give criteria for assessment ahead of time.

* From the workshop participants
Process*

* From the workshop participants

- Specify ground rules. Class-generated?
- Assign roles.
- Consider configuring the groups to account for dominant types, and for quieter students.
- Be clear regarding expectations for participation.
- Encourage discussion over getting the right answer; process over product.
- Especially for long-term groups, check in regarding dynamics before the midpoint; is intervention needed?
Assessment*

• Ask for documentation of process, contribution, etc.

• Consider including components that lend themselves to individual assessments.

*from the workshop participants
Last take-aways

• Not all classes, topics, activities, lend themselves to group work.
• Sometimes even the best-designed group activity doesn’t work.
• Sometimes it is more successful than you think.
• Either way, consider what you can learn from each group and each activity.

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